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Iraq

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2010

November 17, 2010

The constitution recognizes Islam as the official religion and states that no law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam; it also states that no law may be enacted that contradicts principles of democracy or the rights and basic freedoms stipulated in the constitution. Moreover, the constitution guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief and practice for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The country is a constitutional democracy with a republican, federal, pluralistic system of government consisting of 18 provinces or "governorates."

Although the government generally endorsed these rights, violence conducted by terrorists, extremists, and criminal gangs restricted the free exercise of religion and posed a significant threat to the country's vulnerable religious minorities throughout the reporting period. Radical Islamic elements from outside the government exerted tremendous pressure on individuals and groups to conform to extremist interpretations of Islamic precepts. Sectarian violence, including attacks on religious leaders and religious places of worship, hampered the ability to practice religion freely. There was a decrease in the overall level of violence as the government became increasingly successful in restoring security, in a generally nonsectarian manner, throughout the country.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period. Since 2003 the government generally has not persecuted any religious group and has called for tolerance and acceptance of all religious minorities. This commitment was publicly reinforced by the prime minister's order to increase security at Christian places of worship after six churches were attacked in July 2009 as well as to form an investigative committee after a wave of killings that targeted the Christian community in February 2010. In addition the prime minister, along with other high-ranking government officials and political party leaders, made numerous public statements in support of the country's religious minority communities.

Senior U.S. administration and embassy officials called for unity in the face of sectarian violence and pressed for greater inclusion of religious minorities in the political process. The ambassador as well as senior U.S. government officials, Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) officials, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), members of the U.S. military and embassy officials worked to address religious minority concerns with local and national government officials. Embassy, PRT, and military engagements with Iraq's Shi'a, Sunni, Kurd, and religious minority populations include statements by embassy and other U.S. speakers echoing the need for better mutual understanding;

direct engagement/dialogue with opinion leaders, women, and youth; cultural preservation projects; and funding grants and projects that support religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

Due to violence, internal migration, and lack of governmental capacity, religious demography statistics varied. Numbers are often estimates from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) rather than census data or other official sources. The government passed a census law in 2008, which will allow a nationwide census to be conducted in the future.

The country has an area of 168,754 square miles and a population of approximately 28.9 million. According to statistics provided by the government, 97 percent of the population is Muslim. Shi'a Muslims--predominantly Arabs but also Turkmen, Faili (Shi'a) Kurds, and other groups--constitute a 60 to 65 percent majority. Arab and Kurdish Sunni Muslims make up 32 to 37 percent of the population; of these 18 to 20 percent are Sunni Kurds, 12 to 16 percent are Sunni Arabs, and the remaining 1 to 2 percent are Sunni Turkmen. Approximately 3 percent of the population is composed of Christians, Yezidis, Sabean-Mandaeans, Baha'is, Shabaks, Kaka'is (sometimes referred to as Ahl-e Haqq), and a very small number of Jews. Shi'a, although predominantly located in the south and east, are also a majority in Baghdad and have communities in most parts of the country. Sunnis form the majority in the west, center, and the north of the country.

Reported estimates from leaders of the Christian population in 2003 ranged from 800,000 to 1.4 million. Current population estimates by Christian leaders range from 400,000 to 600,000. Approximately two-thirds of Christians are Chaldeans (an eastern rite of the Catholic Church), nearly one-fifth are Assyrians (Church of the East), and the remainder are Syriacs (Eastern Orthodox), Armenians (Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox), Anglicans, and other Protestants. Most Assyrian Christians are in the north, and most Syriac Christians are split among the Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Ninewa Provinces. Christian leaders estimated that as much as 50 percent of the country's Christian population lives in Baghdad, and 30 to 40 percent lives in the north, with the largest Christian communities located in and around Mosul, Erbil, Dohuk, and Kirkuk. The archbishop of the Armenian Orthodox Diocese reported that 15,000 to 16,000 Armenian Christians remained in the country, primarily in the cities of Baghdad, Basrah, Kirkuk, and Mosul. Evangelical Christians reportedly number between 5,000 and 6,000. They can be found in the northern part of the country, as well as in Baghdad, with a small number residing in Basrah.

Yezidi leaders reported that most of the country's 500,000 to 600,000 Yezidis reside in the north, with 15 percent in Dohuk Province and the rest in Ninewa Province. Shabak leaders stated there are 400,000 to 500,000 Shabaks, who reside mainly in the north, near Mosul. Estimates of the size of the Sabean-Mandaean community vary widely; according to Sabean-Mandaean leaders, 3,500 to 7,000 remained in the country, reduced from an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 in 2003. The Baha'i leadership reported their members number fewer than 2,000 and are spread throughout the country in small groups. A sizable portion of the Jewish community, which once had a significant presence in the country, left in the years immediately following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Eight Jews remain in Baghdad, and none are known to live in other parts of the country.

As of March 2010, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported 223,000 active refugee cases for Iraqis living outside of the country and estimated that approximately 1.5 million Iraqis had fled and remain outside the country. In March 2010 the UNHCR reported that 58 percent of all registered Iraqi refugees (in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt) were Sunni, 21 percent were Shi'a, 4 percent were nonspecified Muslim, 13 percent were Christian, 3 percent were Sabean-Mandaean, and fewer than 1 percent were Yezidi. As of April 2010, the Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MDD) had registered 1.55 million internally displaced persons since 2006. In March 2010 the UNHCR, using the UNHCR, MDD, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as sources, estimated there were 2.8 million internally displaced persons in the country. An estimated 59 percent of the internally displaced are Shi'a

Muslims, 35 percent are Sunni Muslims, 5 percent are Christians, and fewer than 1 percent are Yezidis, according to the IOM.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally endorsed this right; however, other legal provisions are subject to interpretations that could limit religious freedom.

Article 10 of the constitution establishes the government's commitment to assuring and maintaining the sanctity of holy shrines and religious sites and to guaranteeing the free practice of rituals there. Article 43 of the constitution states that followers of all religious groups and sects are free in the practice of religious rites and in the management of religious endowments, their affairs, and their religious institutions. The second clause of article 43 provides for freedom of worship and protection of places of worship, although legislation to implement the clause remained outstanding.

It is the government's policy to protect the rights of all religious groups to gather and worship freely; however, in practice ongoing violence and instability impeded citizens' ability to exercise this right in some parts of the country.

Article 2 of the constitution, which recognizes Islam as the country's official religion, mandates that Islam be considered a source of legislation and states that no law can be enacted that contradicts the faith's universally agreed-upon tenets. It also stipulates that no law can be enacted that contradicts the principles of democracy or basic freedoms, including the rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief and practice. Article 14 of the constitution establishes that citizens are equal before the law without discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, origin, color, religion, sect, belief, opinion, or economic or social status.

Article 41, which requires implementing legislation, provides that citizens are free in their commitments to their personal status according to their religious groups, sects, beliefs, or choices; however, until implementing legislation is passed, the 1959 Personal Status Law (Law 188) remains in force. Article 42 of the constitution provides that each person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and belief. However, a 1972 law still in effect makes conversion of minor children to Islam automatic if one of the parents converts to Islam. Despite the Higher Judicial Council's determination that the 1972 law remained valid, the Ministry of Human Rights continued to advocate that the law be overturned.

Religious groups are required to register with the government. In order to register, a group must have a minimum of 500 adherents in the country and receive approval from the Council of Iraqi Christian Church Leaders, a quasi-governmental group consisting of representatives from each of the 14 officially recognized churches.

The government maintains three waqfs, or religious endowments: the Sunni, the Shi'a, and the Christian and Other Religions Endowments. The endowments were formed when the Ministry for Religious Affairs was dissolved under the Coalition Provisional Authority in 2003. The endowments, which operate under the authority of the Prime Minister's Office, receive government funding to maintain and protect religious facilities.

The government requires Islamic religious instruction in public schools, but non-Muslim students are not required to participate. Arabic language instruction, which often uses the Qur'an as a primary text, is required for all students regardless of faith. In most areas of the country, the curriculum of both primary and secondary public schools includes three class periods per week of Islamic education, including study of the Qur'an, as a requirement for graduation. Non-Muslim students throughout the country are not required to participate in Islamic studies; however, some non-Muslim students reported they felt pressure to do so. Private schools such as Al-A'araf Elementary School and the Al-Massara

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School for Girls, which is run by the Eastern Orthodox Church, began operating in the country. To operate legally, private schools must obtain a license from the director general of private and public schools and pay annual fees.

The Kurdistan Region Ministry of Education funds Aramaic-language public schools (elementary and high school) where students are taught in Aramaic, Arabic, and Kurdish. The majority of these (more than 30 elementary schools and eight secondary schools) are in Dohuk. These schools have operated since the late 1980s and are overseen by a special division within the ministry staffed by Christians.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), through the Kurdistan Region Ministry of the Endowment, pays the salaries of imams and funds the construction and maintenance of mosques. This funding is available for Christian religious establishments, but many churches prefer to be self-funded.

Most Islamic holy days are also national holidays, including Ashura, Arbai'n, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Maulid al-Nabi (the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad). Nawruz, a national holiday, is celebrated as a religious holiday by Baha'is. Christmas was declared a national holiday in 2008. Although Easter is not a national holiday, government policy recognizes Christians' right to observe it, and Christian groups reported that they were able to observe the Easter holiday without interference.

Article 1 of the 1969 Penal Code No. 111 mandates that criminal penalties can only be imposed by civil law. Under the country's civil law, there is no penalty for conversion, and the penal code does not impose the Shari'a (Islamic law) penalty, despite the Islamic law punishment for conversion from Islam to another religion. The 1972 Law of Civil Affairs No. 65 explicitly allows non-Muslims to convert to Islam.

At the end of the reporting period, national identity cards continued to note the holder's religion, which has been used as a basis for discrimination; however, passports did not note religion.

Law No. 105 of 1970 prohibits the Baha'i Faith, and a 2001 resolution prohibits the Wahhabi branch of Islam. Although provisions on freedom of religion in the constitution may supersede these laws, no court challenges have been brought to have them invalidated, and no legislation has been proposed to repeal them.

In April 2007 the Ministry of Interior's Nationality and Passport Section canceled regulation 358 of 1975, which prohibited the issuance of a nationality identity card to those claiming the Baha'i Faith. In May 2007 a small number of Baha'is were issued identity cards. The Nationality and Passport Section's legal advisor stopped issuance of the cards thereafter, claiming Baha'is had been registered as Muslims since 1975 and citing a government regulation preventing the conversion of "Muslims" to another faith. Without this official citizenship card, Baha'is cannot register their children for school or acquire passports. Despite the cancellation of the regulation, Baha'is whose identity records were changed to "Muslim" after regulation 358 was instituted in 1975 still could not change their identity cards to indicate their Baha'i faith, and their children were not recognized as Baha'is.

A 2006 citizenship law specifically precluded Jews from regaining citizenship if it would ever be withdrawn.

Article 41 of the constitution states that "Iraqis are free in their commitment to their personal status according to their religions, sects, beliefs, or choices, and this shall be regulated by law." Although the 1959 Personal Status Law calls for incorporation of Islamic law into the law in the absence of legislative text on a matter, article 2(1) of the constitution expressly exempts from its application individuals covered by "special law." Such special law includes British Proclamation No. 6 of 1917 and the Personal Status Law of Foreigners, No. 38, of 1931. Proclamation No. 6 provides that the civil courts consult the religious authority of the non-Muslim parties for its opinion under the applicable religious law and apply this opinion in court. The Personal Status Law of Foreigners also requires that courts apply the municipal law of the foreign litigants to resolve their domestic law matters. Despite this exception there are instances in which this law, based

on Shari'a principles, applies to non-Muslims, thereby overriding rules particular to an individual's religion. For instance the law forbids the marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man; also, in the distribution of inheritance, a female receives one-half of what a male receives. These provisions could be considered inconsistent with article 14 of the constitution, which guarantees equal protection under the law without discrimination based on gender or religion. Other provisions of the constitution, notably article 2(1)(A), prohibit laws from contradicting the "established provisions of Islam," creating potentially conflicting constitutional standards. No court has yet ruled on this issue.

Article 92 of the constitution provides that the Federal Supreme Court shall be made up of a number of judges, experts in Islamic jurisprudence, and legal scholars. At the end of the reporting period, no legislation had been enacted to regulate the number, method of selection, and work of the court, leaving unsettled the question of whether Islamic jurisprudence experts would serve as consultants and advisors to the judges or as members of the court.

The government provides significant support for the Hajj by organizing travel routes and assisting pilgrims with obtaining immunization documents for entry into Saudi Arabia. The government also provides funding to Sunni and Shi'a waqfs, which accept Hajj applications from the public and submit them to the Supreme Council for the Hajj. The council, attached to the Prime Minister's Office, organizes a lottery process that selects pilgrims for official Hajj visas.

Although individuals from minority groups hold senior positions in the national parliament and central government, as well as in the KRG, minorities are proportionally underrepresented in the unelected government workforce, particularly at the provincial and local levels. The government of Iraq and the KRG continued to provide political representation and support to minority communities during the reporting period. The Iraqi Council of Ministers includes two Christian ministers (human rights, industry and minerals), and two Christian ministers (finance, civil society) are in the Kurdistan Region Council of Ministers. The Kurdistan Region Council of Ministers also includes two ministers without portfolio who are prominent Yazidis.

Saddam-era campaigns against Kurds in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in the destruction of a number of Christian villages in Dohuk Province; most residents relocated to Baghdad. Under the supervision of the Kurdistan Region Ministry of Finance, a number of these towns have been reinhabited, housing has been rebuilt, and some original inhabitants who returned have received small stipends.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practices generally did not interfere with the free practice of religion; however, violence in some parts of the country had a negative impact on the ability of all religious believers to practice their faith, although to a lesser extent in the Kurdistan region. Sectarian misappropriation of official authority within the security apparatus, which impeded the right of citizens to worship freely in some cases, continued to be a significant concern.

The government did not restrict the formation of political parties based on religious beliefs or interpretations of religious doctrine.

During the reporting period, there were some schools and other public places where non-Muslim minorities and secular Arabs felt obliged to adhere to certain conservative Islamic practices.

Although a few individuals from minority communities held senior positions in the government, there were reports of religiously based employment discrimination in which ministries hired and showed favoritism toward individuals who shared the minister's religious persuasion. For example, Christian leaders alleged that only three Christians were among the 1,580 new school teachers hired by the Ministry of Education in September 2009.

On June 2, 2010, an Iraqi court heard the first court case alleging unlawful dismissal from employment due to religious and ethnic discrimination. The plaintiff, an Armenian Christian, alleged that the defendant, a senior government official, dismissed him from his job out of a desire to hire an Arab Sunni for the position. The judge found for the defendant, citing a lack of evidence and the lack of witness testimony.

Several evangelical churches complained that they had been unable to obtain official registration from the government and that registration conditions were too onerous.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The government focused its resources and attention during the reporting period primarily on defeating the ongoing insurgency and on reconstruction efforts and had a limited capacity to address matters relating to abuses of freedom of religion. Limitations in security force capabilities and in the country's rule of law infrastructure made it difficult for the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) or the justice system to investigate and prosecute criminal activity, including alleged sectarian-based crimes, although some investigations were carried out.

There were allegations that the KRG engaged in discriminatory behavior against religious minorities. Christians and Yazidis living north of Mosul claimed that the KRG confiscated their property without compensation and that it began building settlements on their land. There were reports that Yazidis faced restrictions when entering the KRG and had to obtain KRG approval to find jobs in areas within Ninewa Province administered by the KRG, or under the security protection of the Peshmerga.

Shabak and some Yazidi political leaders alleged that Kurdish Peshmerga forces regularly committed abuses against, and harassed their communities in, Ninewa Province. Districts that are within the security control of the Peshmerga include Sinjar, Sheikhan, Ba'asheqa (sub-district of Mosul), Zummar (subdistrict of Tal Afar), Tal Kayf, Qataniya (sub-district of Ba'aj), and Bartalla (subdistrict of Hamdaniya). Minority leaders alleged that Kurdish forces intimidated minority communities to identify themselves as Kurds and support their inclusion in the KRG. They also alleged that Peshmerga and Assayeesh allied with Kurdish President Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) routinely harassed and threatened individuals who spoke out against the KDP. Some Yazidi political representatives also reported that because of their religious affiliation, they were not allowed to pass through security checkpoints in areas controlled by Kurdish Peshmerga as they traveled from Baghdad to their communities in the northern part of the country.

The KRG denied allegations that it was behind violent incidents directed at Christians and other minorities. Moreover, despite such allegations, many non-Muslims reside in the north and the KRG area, and there were reports that some sought refuge there from other parts of the country where pressures to conform publicly to narrow interpretations of Islamic tenets were greater. In February 2010 the IOM estimated there were 19,040 internally displaced families in the Ninewa Plain and that 36,000 internally displaced families were located in Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymania provinces, while 8,798 displaced families were in Kirkuk provinces.

The Armenian Orthodox Church of Iraq worked with government officials to regain properties the former regime forced it to sell. Although the church was paid fair market value for properties in Mosul, Basrah, Kirkuk, Baghdad, and Dohuk, it had been forced to sell the properties under pressure. Previous efforts to regain properties did not succeed, but church officials stated that the government rulings in these property claim cases are being appealed.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion; however, Sabean-Mandaeans reported that Islamic extremists threatened, assaulted, kidnapped, and killed members of their religious group for refusing to convert to Islam. Christians living mainly in Baghdad's Doura district, but sometimes other districts as well, and in the cities of Mosul and Kirkuk also reported that Islamic extremists threatened to kill them unless they converted, left, or paid a "jizya" (a tax on non-Muslims).

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

Many individuals from various religious groups were targeted because of their religious identity or secular leanings. Acts committed against them included harassment, intimidation, kidnapping, and murder. The general lawlessness that permitted criminal gangs, terrorists, and insurgents to victimize citizens with impunity affected persons of all ethnicities and religious groups. The overall magnitude of sectarian violence declined during the reporting period. The overwhelming majority of the mass-casualty attacks targeted the Shi'a population.

Shi'a in Sunni-dominated neighborhoods, Sunnis in Shi'a-dominated neighborhoods, and religious minorities in both Sunni- and Shi'a-dominated neighborhoods reported receiving death threat letters demanding that they leave their homes, and in many cases individuals either complied or were killed. These incidents were fewer than in the prior reporting period.

Many attributed sectarian violence in the country to terrorists attempting to sow sectarian strife. The rate of sectarian displacement, which increased as a result of the upsurge in sectarian violence following the 2006 bombing of the al-Askariya Shrine ("the Golden Mosque") in Samarra, remained low during the reporting period. By the end of the reporting period, available evidence suggested that more sectarian integration was taking place than additional sectarian displacement. Although the UNHCR estimated that 22,200 refugees voluntarily returned to the country from abroad between July 2009 and March 2010, there was a net increase in the number of refugee registrations by 2,000 during the first three months of 2010. During this period, the UNHCR recorded 7,400 refugees voluntarily returning but receiving 9,400 new refugee registrations. The UNHCR also estimated that 167,000 internally displaced persons returned to their homes in 2009 and that an additional 30,700 internally displaced persons had returned during the first three months of 2010.

Despite the apparent increase in sectarian integration, numerous incidents of sectarian violence occurred during the reporting period. Very few of the perpetrators of violence committed against Christians and other religious minorities in the country were punished; arrests following a murder or other crimes were rare.

There were no data available on active participation in religious services or rituals; however, terrorist attacks rendered many mosques, churches, and other holy sites unusable. During most of the reporting period, many worshippers reportedly did not attend religious services or participate in religious events because of the threat of violence. Christian leaders inside and outside the country reported that members of their communities received threatening letters demanding that Christians leave or be killed.

Regardless of religious affiliation, women and girls were often threatened for refusing to wear the hijab (head covering), for dressing in western-style clothing, or for failing to adhere sufficiently to strict interpretations of conservative Islamic norms governing public behavior. Numerous women, including Christians, reported opting to wear the hijab for security purposes after being harassed for not doing so.

During the reporting period, Sabean-Mandaean leaders reported that their community continued to be targeted, although with less frequency than in the previous reporting period. In addition to being forced to convert, they reported kidnappings, with victims held for ransom. In some cases ransom was paid; however, among those cases only some were released; others were killed or remained missing. Women were pressured to wear the hijab and to marry non-Sabean-Mandaean men. Sabean-Mandaeans also reported that their gold and jewelry stores have been burglarized and robbed.

During the reporting period, Yezidi and Shabak leaders reported that their communities also continued to be targets of harassment and violence.

For political reasons terrorists, extremists, other entities, and criminals for profit often perpetrated violence against religious minorities.

On June 24, 2010, a bomb killed two Iranian Shi'ite pilgrims and injured five others when it exploded near their bus near the city of Maqdadiyah in Diyala Province.

On June 10, 2010, Christian businessman Hani Salim Wadi was shot and killed in front of his house in Kirkuk. According to *Asia News*, eyewitnesses to the event described it as a "targeted killing."

On June 9, 2010, four gunmen killed three Sabeen-Mandean goldsmiths and injured four others during a robbery of three shops in the city of Basra.

On June 3, 2010, a bomb placed in a car exploded in a shopping district in the Yezidi city of Sinjar, killing three Yezidi persons and injuring 12.

On May 16, 2010, four gunmen killed and beheaded anti-al-Qa'ida cleric Abdullah Jassim Shakour in Sadiyah, a town north of Baghdad.

On May 5, 2010, gunmen shot and killed a Sunni imam, Abdul-Jalil al-Fehdawi, who was the deputy head of the Council of Iraqi Scholars, an independent body that issues religious instructions (fatwas). The shooting came as the imam left his home in the western Baghdad district of Amiriya and resulted in the deaths of three others. The prime minister established a committee to investigate the matter.

On May 4, 2010, a Sunni imam, Abdul Majid al-Jubouri, was killed when gunmen shot him in the head and back at a mosque during evening prayers. Two other worshippers were also injured in the attack.

On May 2, 2010, an explosive device targeting a convoy of buses taking Christian students to the University of Mosul exploded, killing one bystander and injuring at least 70 students.

On April 23, 2010, five car bombs exploded near four Shi'ite mosques in the neighborhoods of Sadr City, Hurriyah, Ameen, and Zafraniya in Baghdad, killing at least 58 persons. Two of the car bombs exploded near the offices of Muqtada al-Sadr in Sadr City as worshippers were leaving Friday prayers and killed at least 34 persons and injured 120 others. The bomb in Hurriyah killed eight persons, the bomb in Ameen killed 16, and the explosion in Zafaraniya killed one.

On April 14, 2010, a Sunni cleric, Sheikh Ghazi Jabouri, was shot and killed by a group of gunmen using automatic weapons outside the al-Rahman mosque in the neighborhood of Azamiyah in north Baghdad.

On March 27, 2010, a bomb planted near the home of a Christian family in Mosul exploded, killing a three-year-old child and injuring three other family members at the house.

On March 17, 2010, an armed man shot and killed a Christian man, Sabah Yacoub Adam, near the Church of the Dominican Fathers in the neighborhood of al-Saa in Mosul. Adam had returned to Mosul after fleeing the city the month prior to his killing.

On March 15, 2010, a Sunni imam, Abdul-Rahman al-Karbouli, was killed by a bomb near his home in the town of Khaldiya, west of Baghdad.

On March 6, 2010, a bomb killed four Iranian pilgrims and injured 54 other persons in the city of Najaf near the Imam Ali shrine.

On February 21, 2010, gunmen shot and killed one Shi'ite pilgrim and injured seven others in the city of Taji as their minibus passed through the town.

On February 21, 2010, a suicide bomber exploded his vest after being shot by security guards as he tried to enter a mosque near Tikrit. The explosion killed one person and injured six.

Between February 14 and February 20, 2010, eight Christians were killed in the city of Mosul in five separate incidents. On February 14, Fatukhi Munir was shot and killed inside his store in a drive-by attack. On February 15, Rayan Salem Elias was killed outside his home. On February 16, an engineering student, Zia Toma, was shot and killed while another student, Ramsin Shamel, was injured in the same attack. On February 17, the body of Wissam George, a 20-year-old, was found shot to death in the neighborhood of Wadi al-Ain. On February 20, Adnan al-Dahan was found in the district of al-Belladiyat with bullet wounds to the head. Dahan had been kidnapped from his store in the neighborhood of al-Hadba the week before he was found. Also on February 20, gunmen entered the house of Aishwa Maroki and shot and killed him and his two sons. As a result of these attacks, a number of Christian families fled Mosul to neighboring towns. Government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh announced the formation of a high-level investigative committee to find the perpetrators, and media reports announced the arrest of four persons in early March in connection with the killings, although it was uncertain if any case was heard in court. The attacks were believed to have been carried out by extremists with ties to al-Qa'ida.

On February 13, 2010, a female suicide bomber killed four persons and injured 10 others in the city of al-Kufa when she detonated her explosive belt among a convoy of Shi'ite religious pilgrims who were traveling to Najaf.

On February 5, 2010, two car bombs targeting Shi'ite pilgrims commemorating the religious holiday of Arbaeen near the city of Karbala killed at least 27 persons and injured 75.

On February 3, 2010, a bomb attached to a parked motorcycle exploded among a group of Shi'ite pilgrims in the city of Karbala, killing 23 persons and injuring 147. The pilgrims were in Karbala to commemorate the religious holiday of Arbaeen.

On February 1, 2010, a female suicide bomber detonated an explosive vest among a crowd of Shi'ite pilgrims in northern Baghdad, killing 41 persons and injuring 106 others. The pilgrims were on their way to Karbala to mark the Shi'ite religious holiday of Arbaeen.

On January 31, 2010, a roadside bomb targeting Shi'ite pilgrims on their way to Karbala exploded in al-Mashtel in East Baghdad, injuring three persons. On the same day, armed men threw a hand grenade at a group of Shi'ite pilgrims in Bayaa in southwest Baghdad, injuring six. In another incident a roadside bomb injured four Shi'ite pilgrims near the Um al Tubul mosque in Yarmouk, west of Baghdad.

On January 30, 2010, an individual threw a hand grenade at Shi'ite pilgrims in Saidiya in southern Baghdad, killing one person and injuring two others. In a separate incident on the same day, gunmen injured two Shi'ite pilgrims in the Doura neighborhood of Baghdad.

On January 28, 2010, a Sunni Arab imam, Sheikh Ahmed Sa'dum Saleh, was shot and killed as he left his mosque in the district of Adel in western Baghdad after noon prayers.

On January 26, 2010, gunmen in a vehicle shot at two buses of Iranian Shi'ite pilgrims in Baghdad, killing two persons and injuring five.

On January 18, 2010, gunmen entered a food store in the al-Sadeq neighborhood of northern Mosul and shot and killed the owner, who was a Christian man.

On January 17, 2010, a Christian was killed by gunmen in the al-Majmoua al-Thaqafiya neighborhood of northern Mosul.

On January 14, 2010, three bombs exploded in the city of Najaf in the vicinity of one of the holiest sites in Shi'ite Islam, the tomb of the Imam Ali, killing 25 persons and injuring 72.

On January 11, 2010, a Christian vegetable merchant was shot and killed by gunmen in the al-Sinaa al-Qadeema area of western Mosul.

On January 10, 2010, three Christian students were injured by bomb inside Mosul University that hit a bus transporting university students to the predominantly Christian district of Hamdaniyah.

On January 4, 2010, a car bomb exploded in the town of Bartalla in the governorate of Ninewah, injuring 10 persons, including two Christians.

On December 30, 2009, a Christian man was shot and injured by a group of gunmen as he entered his shop in district of al-Jadida in Mosul.

On December 28, 2009, a Christian university student, Sarah Edmond Youkhana, was kidnapped in Mosul by an organization identifying itself as the "Islamic State of Iraq."

On December 27, 2009, five Shi'ite celebrating Ashura were killed by a bomb in the town of Tuz Khormato. On the same day, another two Shi'ite pilgrims were killed by a roadside bomb in Baghdad.

On December 26, 2009, two Shi'ite pilgrims were killed and 11 others injured on their way to Karbala when their vehicle was struck by a roadside bomb. On the same day, a hand grenade was thrown into a procession of Shi'ite worshippers celebrating Ashura in Baghdad, injuring five persons.

On December 24, 2009, a bomb targeting a procession to mark Ashura killed nine individuals and injured 33 in Sadr City, while another explosion in the city of Karbala injured 26 persons.

On December 24, 2009, a 23-year old Christian, Basel Isho Yohanna, was shot and killed in front of his home in Mosul.

On December 23, 2009, a bomb hidden in a handcart exploded across the street from the Syrian Orthodox Church of Saint Thomas in Mosul, killing two persons and injuring five others.

On December 23, 2009, three Shi'ite pilgrims were killed and 28 injured by a bomb in Baghdad targeting worshipers participating in religious rituals associated with Ashura.

On December 22, 2009, two Shi'ites were shot and killed by men in a car as they departed a mosque in the village of Berginiya, near the town of Baquba. The shooting took place after the victims had carried out rituals associated with the religious commemoration of Ashura.

On December 17, 2009, a Christian man, Zaid Majid Yusef, was killed in a drive-by shooting near his home in the city of Mosul. According to news reports, the gunman exited his vehicle to make sure that the victim had been killed.

On December 15, 2009, bombs detonated outside of the Syriac Catholic Church of the Annunciation and the Syriac Orthodox Church of the Virgin Mary in Mosul killed five persons, including a baby girl, and injured 40. As a result of the attacks, the Iraqi army was put on a state of alert to protect Christians during the Christmas holidays.

On December 10, 2009, the bodies of two Christian brothers from village of Batnaya were found in Mosul with gunshot wounds to their heads. The brothers were reported to have gone to Mosul the day before to repair their truck.

On December 8, 2009, the Chaldean Patriarchate building, the residence and offices of the head of the Chaldean Church in the country, suffered collateral damage from a series of bombs across Baghdad that killed 127 people and injured 500, although no one at the Chaldae complex was killed.

On November 30, 2009, an unknown individual threw a hand grenade that exploded in the Hawenjah neighborhood of west Kirkuk, injuring 26 persons during the celebration of Eid.

On November 26, 2009, Saint Ephrem's Chaldean Church and Saint Theresa's Convent in Mosul were bombed, causing extensive damage to the buildings. According to news reports, five nuns were living in the convent building but escaped the attack unharmed.

On November 26, 2009, two homemade bombs exploded in a market in the city of Mussayib, south of Baghdad, killing three persons and injuring 28. The attack occurred on the first day of Eid al-Adha.

On November 25, 2009, two bombs exploded at a restaurant in Karbala, killing four persons and injuring 26. The second bomb exploded as an ambulance and medics arrived on the scene to care for the victims of the first bomb.

On November 24, 2009, the imam of al-Saqlawiya Mosque, a Sunni mosque in Falluja, was killed when a bomb that was attached to his car exploded. On the same day, the imam of al-Arqam Mosque, a Sunni mosque in the Al-Mikanik neighborhood of southern Baghdad, was also killed by a bomb attached to his car.

On November 23, 2009, a Christian oil industry worker, Putrus Matti Isaac, was kidnapped by gunmen on his way to work in Kirkuk.

On November 17, 2009, 13 Sunni men, including a Sunni politician from the Iraqi Islamic Party, were killed execution-style with silenced guns west of Baghdad. According to media reports, the perpetrators were wearing Iraqi army uniforms and kidnapped the men from their homes in the villages of Abid and Khodeir Zaidan.

On November 13, 2009, a Christian teenager was killed in a drive-by shooting outside his home in Mosul. According to witnesses, three gunmen were involved.

On October 25, 2009, although not targeted specifically, the Anglican Church of Saint George's and the Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady of Fatima were damaged when two car bombs targeting the Ministry of Justice and Baghdad Provincial Council exploded, killing at least 150 persons and injuring 600 others.

On October 16, 2009, a gunman attacked Sunni worshippers at the Taqwa mosque in the town of Tal Afar and then detonated an explosive vest killing 15 persons, including the mosque's imam, Abdual-Satar Hassan, and injuring at least 100 others.

On October 15, 2009, three bombs exploded among crowds of Shi'ites gathered for evening prayers near the shrines of Husseni and Abbas in Karbala, killing six persons and injuring 45.

On October 14, 2009, the imam of the Abu Hanifah al-Nuaaman mosque in northern Baghdad, the largest Sunni mosque in the city, was injured when a bomb attached to his car exploded.

On October 12, 2009, a Christian man, Samer Mowafuq al-Naqqar, was shot and killed in Baghdad.

On October 5, 2009, the body of a Christian nurse, Imad Elias Abdul Karim, was found in a field in Kirkuk with gunshot wounds to the chest. Karim had been kidnapped on October 3, but his family was not able to pay the demanded ransom. According to news reports, a number of Christian families fled the city in response to the killing.

On September 27, 2009, a Christian doctor, Mahasin Bashir, was kidnapped from her home and held for a day before being released after a \$40,000 ransom was paid by her family.

On September 19, 2009, two Sabeen-Mandean goldsmiths, Farqad Faiq Authman and Muhand Qasim Abdul-Razzaq, were killed in their shops in Basrah by four masked men using silenced pistols and knives.

On September 12, 2009, two bombs exploded near the Shi'ite shrine of Sheikh Othman al-Omari in Baghdad, killing four persons and injuring more than 12 others.

On September 12, 2009, a bomb was discovered inside a Qur'an by security forces and defused without incident inside the Shi'a shrine of Musa al-Khadim in northern Baghdad.

On September 9, 2009, a truck bomb exploded in the Kaka'i village of Wardek, located in Ninewah Governorate, killing 20 persons and injuring 40.

On September 7, 2009, a bomb placed on a crowded minivan in the city of Karbala exploded as the vehicle departed the city, killing 12 people and injuring one.

On September 7, 2009, a 60-year old Christian businessman, Salem Barjjo, was found dead after he had been abducted in Mosul in early August.

On September 2, 2009, a Sabeen-Mandean man was killed and his wife was injured when assailants entered their house in Baghdad and attacked them.

On August 30, 2009, a Christian man, Hikmat Sayid, was kidnapped in Mosul. He was released on September 11.

On August 29, 2009, a bomb placed in a truck exploded at a market in the Yezidi city of Sinjar, killing four persons and injuring 23.

On August 18, 2009, a Christian doctor, Sameer Gorgees Youssif, was kidnapped in Kirkuk and held in captivity until September 16, when his family paid the kidnappers a \$100,000 ransom. During his captivity Youssif was tortured and starved. Another Christian, Sabah Dawood Askar, was killed when he attempted to stop the abduction on August 18.

On August 13, 2009, two suicide bombers detonated explosives in a popular café in the city of Sinjar, killing 21 Yazidis and injuring 30 others.

On August 10, 2009, two truck bombs exploded in the Shabak village of Khazna, east of Mosul, killing at least 34 persons, injuring 155 others, and severely damaging the entire village.

On August 7, 2009, a truck bomb exploded at a mosque in the village of Shirakhan near Mosul during a funeral service, killing 37 Shi'ite Turkmen and injuring 276.

On August 7, 2009, a roadside bomb targeting Shi'ite pilgrims on their way to Karbala exploded in the Doura neighborhood of Baghdad, killing one person and injuring three.

On August 6, 2009, a Sabean-Mandean, We'am Abdul Nabi Lazem, was killed in his shop in the Iskan district of Baghdad.

On August 2, 2009, a bomb placed at an outdoor market in the Sunni town of Haditha exploded, killing seven persons and injuring 20.

On July 31, 2009, five bombs exploded within 45 minutes at five separate Shi'ite mosques in Baghdad in a coordinated attack that killed at least 29 persons and injured 136. The worst attack occurred in the area of Al-Shaab where a car bomb killed 21 persons and injured 35.

On July 26, 2009, a Christian man was shot and killed in a soft drinks factory near Mosul.

On July 22, 2009, five Shi'ite religious pilgrims from Iran were killed and 35 injured when gunmen attacked their convoy of buses northeast of Baghdad as they were in route to holy sites within Iraq.

On July 21, 2009, three bombs in the predominantly Shi'ite neighborhood of Sadr City killed at least seven persons and injured 31 others.

On July 21, 2009, a bomb outside a mosque in the Baghdad neighborhood of Baab al-Muadham killed one person.

On July 15, 2009, a bomb exploded at the entrance of a funeral tent in the predominantly Shi'ite neighborhood of Sadr City, killing five persons and injuring 26.

On July 13, 2009, a car bomb exploded near a Shi'ite mosque in Mosul that had been deserted since 2005, causing damage to the mosque and collateral damage to a nearby Christian church.

On July 12, 2009, six churches were bombed in coordinated attacks in Baghdad, resulting in the deaths of three Christians and one Muslim and leaving 20 injured. Attacks on five of the churches involved minor explosives, but the car bomb that exploded near the Church of Marian Al-Adra as parishioners were leaving Mass resulted in the vast majority of the casualties. The government condemned the attacks and ordered the ISF to increase its presence around churches throughout Baghdad.

On July 12, 2009, gunmen shot and killed Aziz Rizko Nissan al-Bidari, the director general of the Financial Audit Directorate and the most senior Christian government official in Kirkuk.

On July 8, 2009, a bomb exploded near a Shi'ite mosque located in a Shabak neighborhood in the city of Mosul, killing nine persons and injuring 22 others. Another bomb on the same day in a different Shabak neighborhood injured seven people.

On June 20, 2009, a suicide truck bomb exploded near the mosque of Al-Rasool Al-a'dham in the town of Taza, south of Kirkuk, killing at least 68 persons and injuring nearly 200. On December 29, 2009, the Rusafa criminal court found three men--Adnam Jassim Ali al-Hamdani, Walid Mahmoud Mohammed al-Hamdani, and Hwawa Falah al-Juburi--guilty of the crime and sentenced them to death. The three men had been arrested in Kirkuk on October 3, 2009.

During a 10-day period in the beginning of October 2008, 14 Christians were killed in Mosul, prompting more than 2,000 families to flee their homes for villages in the Ninewa Plain north of the city. The attacks followed protests in which hundreds of Christians demonstrated for greater representation on the country's local provincial councils. Leaflets were distributed in predominantly Christian neighborhoods threatening families to convert to Islam, pay the "jizya" tax, leave the

city, or be killed. During the last months of 2008, the majority of Christian families who had fled returned to Mosul. A government investigation into the killings had not been made public by the end of the reporting period.

In a symbolically significant event, the Chaldean archbishop of Mosul, Paulus Faraj Rahho, was kidnapped in February 2008 for failing to pay protection money to Islamic insurgents. The archbishop died while in captivity. Government security forces subsequently arrested one of the kidnappers, and he was sentenced to death, although it was unknown when or if this sentence was carried out.

Shopkeepers were targeted for providing goods or services considered to be inconsistent with Islam, and sometimes were subjected to violence for failing to comply with warnings to stop such activity. Liquor store owners, primarily Christians and Yezidis, were especially targeted. A liquor store was the apparent target on June 3, 2010, when a bomb placed in a car exploded in a shopping district in the Yezidi city of Sinjar, killing three Yezidis and injuring 12. On April 13, 2010, a bomb planted inside a liquor store in Baghdad exploded, killing three persons and injuring seven. One of those killed was the Christian owner of the store. On February 28, 2010, a liquor store owner and three customers were killed by a bomb targeting the store in the al-Daoudi area of western Baghdad. On February 21, 2010, a bomb exploded in a liquor store in the Alashar district in Basra. There were no casualties. On February 14, 2010, two were injured in an explosion that targeted a liquor store on al-Rabie Street in western Baghdad. The store was damaged extensively. On December 6, 2009, Baghdad Governor Salah Abdul-Razzaq announced that the police had closed 95 unlicensed night clubs and 42 liquor stores since the start of November 2009, citing the fact that the venues were undermining "public morals."

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, the government took direct responsibility for protecting the population, which led to improvements in the overall security environment. However, violence before and after the national election in March 2010 challenged the government's ability to maintain a secure environment for the population.

On June 26, 2010, the governor of Ninewa Governorate, Atheel al-Nujafi, announced at a Christian leadership conference on minority rights his willingness to establish a mechanism that would include all elements of civil society to defend minority rights.

On May 9, 2010, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki established a committee to investigate the killing of Sunni imam Abdul-Jalil al-Fahdawi, who was the deputy head of the Council of Iraqi Scholars.

In April 2010 the ISF increased security around Christian churches east of Mosul based on reports that they were being targeted by extremists.

In April 2010 the first Christian radio station broadcasting Bible readings and hymns began operating in Basrah with the approval of the Basrah city council.

On February 25, 2010, in response to the killing of eight Christians over the period of a week, the government announced the formation of an expedited investigation into the management of checkpoints near the locations of the incidents and a follow-up committee to provide additional security measures to protect Christian individuals, property, and religious establishments. On March 3, 2010, media reports announced the arrest of four individuals in connection with the killings.

In January 2010 the government of Iraq and the KRG established a series of combined security mechanisms (CSM) throughout the disputed internal boundary areas, including within the Ninewa Province, that comprised a series of trilateral --ISF, Kurdish Peshmerga and United States Forces-Iraq (USF-I)--combined checkpoints and patrols. After the establishment of the CSM, there was a significant reduction in mass casualty attacks targeting religious and ethnic minority communities in Ninewa.

On December 27, 2009, the governor of Ninewa Province, Atheel al-Nujafi, announced the formation of a committee to investigate clashes between the Shabak and Christian communities of Bartalla that took place on December 25, 2009.

On December 23, 2009, the ISF deployed 50,000 soldiers and policemen to Karbala and Najaf to protect the nearly one million religious pilgrims who traveled to the cities to commemorate the Shi'ite religious holiday of Ashura.

On December 18, 2009, the Ministry of Defense put the army on alert in Baghdad and the governorates of Kirkuk and Ninewa to protect Christian places of worship over the Christmas holiday.

On December 7, 2009, the Ministry of Interior sponsored the second annual "Jesus Day" festival in Baghdad with the objective of promoting tolerance and understanding. The festival featured prominent Christian imagery and a performance by the country's National Symphony Orchestra. Minister of Interior Jawad al-Bolani and prominent Sunni leader Ahmed Abu Risha attended the event.

On October 20, 2009, the ISF in the city of Tal Afar developed a plan with local citizens to enhance security at all places of worship after a suicide bomber attacked worshippers at the Taqwa mosque on October 16, 2009.

In October 2009 the government agreed to return six schools to the Chaldean Church by the beginning of the spring semester in 2010. These schools had been previously been run by the Chaldean Church but had been expropriated without compensation by the government during the regime of Saddam Hussein.

On July 23, 2009, the undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, Major General Ahmed Abu-Righeef, announced the formation of a committee to supervise and follow up on the protection of churches and other places of Christian worship throughout the country. As part of this effort, the government began to dig trenches around the Christian towns of Tal Kaif and Hamdaniya in Ninewa Province to protect them from car bombs.

On July 13, 2009, the ISF increased security around Christian churches in Baghdad in response to a series of coordinated attacks the previous day. In Ninewa Province the ISF announced a traffic ban in the predominantly Christian areas of Hamdaniya, Bartala, Basheeqa, Tal Kaif, and Kramlis. The government also agreed to hire 500 Christians and Sabean-Mandeans for the Ministry of Interior to provide additional long-term protection at places of worship.

The government also enhanced security at churches throughout the country during Easter celebrations.

On December 6, 2009, the Council of Representatives passed an amendment to the National Elections Law that reserved eight seats for minority groups throughout the country--two in Baghdad (one each for Christians and Sabean-Mandaeans), three in Ninewa Governorate (one each for Christians, Yezidis, and Shabaks), and one each in the provinces of Erbil, Dohuk, and Kirkuk for Christians. In addition six Yezidi candidates were elected to the national parliament as part of the Kurdistan Alliance list, bringing the total religious minority representatives to 14.

The government maintained a substantial budget for the Directorate for non-Muslim Endowments, which used the funds to renovate and protect minority religious sites. According to press reports, the government launched a project to renovate the interior of the Shrine of Ezekiel, a prominent Jewish heritage site that Christians and Muslims also revere.

During the reporting period, government leaders spoke of the need for all citizens to unite--regardless of religious orientation--to confront terrorism. The government publicly denounced incidents of sectarian violence and repeatedly encouraged unity among the country's religious sects. Government leaders often emphasized their commitment to equal treatment for all religious groups and ethnicities.

On May 11, 2010, in response to the May 2, 2010, attack targeting a convoy of buses taking Christian students to the University of Mosul and to the subsequent demand by the students for an alternative to going to Mosul for exams, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research formed a committee to study the situation for Christian students at Mosul prior to final exams. On May 3, 2010, the president of the KRG, Massoud Barzani, condemned the May 2 attacks, noting that Mosul has been the home of Christians "for a very long time."

On December 25, 2009, KRG President Barzani issued a statement in which he stated, "I would like to stress the importance of peaceful coexistence and religious tolerance in a federal Iraq and demand that all attacks against Christians and churches be stopped." He added that "We will continue to defend the rights of Christians, and they are always welcome to the Kurdistan Region."

On July 19, 2009, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki met with Cardinal Emmanuel Delly III, the Chaldean patriarch of Babylon, to discuss the attacks on Christian churches on July 12, 2010. The Prime Minister's Office issued a statement noting that the "Iraqi government is exerting its efforts to ensure the freedom of religions and beliefs and to protect the houses of worship that belong to all Iraqi religions and sects."

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Conservative and extremist Islamic elements continued to exert pressure on society to conform to their interpretations of Islam's precepts. Although these efforts affected all citizens, non-Muslims were especially vulnerable to this pressure and violence because of their minority status and their lack of protection provided by a tribal structure. For example, Sabean-Mandaeans, who are few in number and live in small groups spread across the country, continued to report that they were targeted by Islamic militias.

Sunni Muslims also continued to claim general discrimination during the reporting period, alleging that it was due to an ongoing campaign of revenge by the Shi'a majority for the Sunnis' presumed favored status and abuses of Shi'a under the former regime, and also because of the public's perception that the insurgency was comprised primarily of Sunni extremists and former regime elements with whom the majority of the Sunni population supposedly sympathized. Although some within the Sunni community supported and even assisted the insurgency, there was a broad Sunni rejection of al-Qa'ida in Iraq, as evidenced by their participation in the government, provincial elections, and the anti-insurgency Awakening Councils.

In general minorities were underrepresented, especially at the provincial level, where they lacked full representation in the provincial councils, limiting their access to government-provided security and economic development. The March 2010 national elections helped somewhat to improve representation. Non-Muslims, particularly Christians and Yezidis, complained of being politically isolated by the Muslim majority because of their religious differences.

The combination of discriminatory hiring practices by members of the majority Muslim population, attacks against non-Muslim businesses, corruption, and the overall lack of rule of law also had a detrimental economic effect on the non-Muslim communities and contributed to the departure of significant numbers of non-Muslims from the country.

Many Yezidi towns in Ninewa are in areas where control is disputed between the KRG and the central government and, as a result, these towns suffered from inadequate municipal services. The KRG provided some services, including payment of salaries for Yezidi religious instruction at certain state-funded schools.

In April 2010 Christians in Hamdaniya, east of Mosul, despite receiving threats not to, erected a small statue of Jesus, similar to the one in Rio de Janeiro. Christian volunteers guarded the statue.

Despite the attacks against Christians in February and against Christian university students in May, the security improvements in Mosul allowed a majority of displaced Christians to return to, and remain in, their homes.

On December 25, 2009, clashes between Shabak and Christian villagers in the town of Batala left three injured. The dispute centered on competing religious festivals and rumors that religious symbols had been taken down.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government is committed to promoting religious freedom and continues to work closely with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. officials from the Department of State, the armed forces, the embassy, and PRTs met regularly with representatives of all of the country's religious and ethnic communities, including its minority communities, and maintained an active dialogue.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs for Iraq Michael Corbin serves as the department's special coordinator for the country's religious and ethnic minority communities. During the reporting period, the special coordinator visited minority refugee populations in the United States as well as minority communities in Baghdad and northern Iraq to discuss the political, economic, and security challenges facing these communities.

The U.S. ambassador and the ambassador's senior advisor to Northern Iraq engaged religious minority communities in their areas. PRT officials, USAID, and USF-I worked with department and embassy officials to address minority concerns. Embassy officials raised minority concerns in meetings with the country's senior government officials.

Congress authorized \$10 million in the "Statement of Managers" for both the FY 2008 base and FY 2008 supplemental appropriations, of Economic Support Fund money for the country to be directed toward projects to assist religious and ethnic minorities. To date, USAID and the Department of State have spent more than \$25 million in projects to support these communities and were executing a third directive from the FY 2010 base appropriation for \$10 million. These projects focused on both the immediate and longer-term needs of these communities, including economic development, essential and humanitarian services, and capacity development.

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